Complete Summary

GUIDELINE TITLE

Guidelines for the field management of combat-related head trauma. Assessment: Glasgow Coma Scale scoring and assessment of pupils.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCE(S)

Knuth T, Letarte PB, Ling G, Moores LE, Rhee P, Tauber D, Trask A. Guidelines for the field management of combat-related head trauma. Assessment: Glasgow Coma Scale scoring and assessment of pupils. New York (NY): Brain Trauma Foundation; 2005. 10 p. [27 references]

GUIDELINE STATUS

This is the current release of the guideline.

COMPLETE SUMMARY CONTENT

SCOPE

DISEASE/CONDITION(S)

Combat-related traumatic brain injury

GUIDELINE CATEGORY

Evaluation
Management

CLINICAL SPECIALTY

Emergency Medicine
Neurological Surgery
Neurology

INTENDED USERS

Emergency Medical Technicians/Paramedics
Physicians

GUIDELINE OBJECTIVE(S)

- To provide dispassionate analysis of the known benefits and risks of therapies available to the brain injured patient in the field
- To be a resource and a tool for the combat medic, physician, commanding officer, and logistician who must then make the tough "on the ground" therapeutic, tactical, and logistical decisions that will ultimately result in optimum care for the injured combatant
- To review methods to assess depth of coma as a proxy for severity of brain injury

TARGET POPULATION

Combat personnel who sustain traumatic brain injury in the field

INTERVENTIONS AND PRACTICES CONSIDERED

1. Assessment of Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) score
2. Assessment of pupil size and function

MAJOR OUTCOMES CONSIDERED

- Validity and reliability of Glasgow Coma Score (GCS) and pupil assessment for predicting clinical outcome
- Correlation of GCS score to mortality

METHODOLOGY

METHODS USED TO COLLECT/SELECT EVIDENCE

Hand-searches of Published Literature (Primary Sources)
Hand-searches of Published Literature (Secondary Sources)
Searches of Electronic Databases

DESCRIPTION OF METHODS USED TO COLLECT/SELECT THE EVIDENCE

General Search Strategy

In order to create an evidence-based document relevant to the field treatment of brain injury, the literature was searched for each topic for publications on brain injury that pertained to the prehospital or austere environment. From the

comprehensive literature searches, articles were selected which were relevant to the field management of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and utilized human data. Articles with outcomes related to morbidity and mortality were preferred. In establishing a literature base for recommendations, the guideline authors generally only include publications that involve human subjects. However, in these Guidelines, they have included some publications that involve training with mannequins given that such training is an accepted practice in assessing competency for emergency medical technician (EMT) certification. Additional studies were, in general, referenced only as a part of background discussion. The prehospital literature was heavily utilized; military literature was used where it was available.

Specific Strategy for This Topic

The search engine PubMed was used. The time period was 1980 to 2005. The queries were based on the terms "head injury," "military," "GCS," "pupils" and "pupillary response." Changing the terms to "brain injury," "TBI," "loss of consciousness," and "combat" did not identify any other articles. Queries using "GCS" and "performance" and "first providers" and "military" and "pupils" yielded no articles. Changing the terms to "medic," "retention," and "combat" did not identify any other articles. Review of the bibliography of identified articles also did not identify any other pertinent articles.

NUMBER OF SOURCE DOCUMENTS

7

METHODS USED TO ASSESS THE QUALITY AND STRENGTH OF THE EVIDENCE

Weighting According to a Rating Scheme (Scheme Given)

RATING SCHEME FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE EVIDENCE

Classification of Evidence

Class I: Evidence from good quality, randomized, controlled clinical trials (RCT)

Class II: Evidence from moderate or poor quality RCT, good quality cohort, or good quality case-control studies

Class III: Evidence from moderate or poor quality cohort; moderate or poor quality case control; or case series, databases, or registries

Additional detail on quality criteria for each category is available in the original guideline document.

METHODS USED TO ANALYZE THE EVIDENCE

Systematic Review with Evidence Tables

DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODS USED TO ANALYZE THE EVIDENCE

The Guidelines follow the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) Committee to Advise the Public Health Service on Clinical Practice Guidelines outlined below:

1. There should be a link between the available evidence and the recommendations.
2. Empirical evidence should take precedence over expert judgment in the development of guidelines.
3. The available scientific literature should be searched using appropriate and comprehensive search terminology.
4. A thorough review of the scientific literature should precede guideline development.
5. The evidence should be evaluated and weighted, depending on the scientific validity of the methodology used to generate the evidence.
6. The strength of the evidence should be reflected in the strength of the recommendations, reflecting scientific certainty (or lack thereof).
7. Expert judgment should be used to evaluate the quality of the literature and to formulate guidelines when the evidence is weak or nonexistent.
8. Guideline development should be a multidisciplinary process, involving key groups affected by the recommendations.

METHODS USED TO FORMULATE THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Expert Consensus

DESCRIPTION OF METHODS USED TO FORMULATE THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors of these guidelines, entitled *Guidelines for the Field Management of Combat-Related Head Trauma*, represented a multidisciplinary group consisting of neurosurgeons, trauma surgeons, neurointensivists, and paramedics from both the civilian and the military sectors. They were selected for their expertise in traumatic brain injury (TBI), combat medicine, or military medical education. All the military authors had recent combat experience. Each author independently conducted a MEDLINE or comparable search, reviewed and evaluated the literature for their assigned topics, then cooperated in formulating the Guidelines during several work sessions aimed at completing understandable and applicable recommendations based on the best evidence available. The template for these Guidelines was the first edition of the *Guidelines for Prehospital Management of Traumatic Brain Injury* developed by Brain Trauma Foundation (BTF) in 1999–2000.

Section I of each chapter in the original guideline document describes the conclusions the authors formulated from the literature. For the chapters on assessment, which included prognosis studies, the authors summarized the evidence rather than made recommendations. Thus, their findings are listed as "Conclusions" for any diagnostic or prognostic assessment and as "Recommendations" where the end result is a specific treatment or set of treatment options. Section VII in each chapter provides a brief analysis of the

literature that supports the conclusions or recommendations, whereas Section VIII references a more extensive list of studies.

RATING SCHEME FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Degrees of Certainty*

Standards: Reflect a *high degree of clinical certainty* as indicated by the scientific evidence available (supported by Class I evidence).

Guidelines: Reflect a *moderate degree of clinical certainty* as indicated by the scientific evidence available (supported by Class II evidence).

Options: Reflect *unclear clinical certainty* as indicated by the scientific evidence available (supported by Class III evidence).

*For the chapters on assessment, which included prognosis studies, the guideline authors summarized the evidence rather than made recommendations. Thus, their findings are listed as "Conclusions" for any diagnostic or prognostic assessment, and no "degrees of certainty" were assigned.

COST ANALYSIS

A formal cost analysis was not performed and published cost analyses were not reviewed.

METHOD OF GUIDELINE VALIDATION

External Peer Review
Internal Peer Review

DESCRIPTION OF METHOD OF GUIDELINE VALIDATION

At several points during the development process, a review team comprised of representatives of the armed services medical "school houses," military neurosurgery and trauma surgery, and military medic instruction evaluated the document, and their comments were delivered to the authors. Several draft documents were produced and evaluated before this document was finalized and published. (The names of the reviewers are listed at the front of the original guideline document.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Note from the Brain Trauma Foundation (BTF) and the National Guideline Clearinghouse (NGC): For the chapters on assessment, which included prognosis studies, the guideline authors summarized the evidence rather than made recommendations. Thus, their findings are listed as "Conclusions" for any diagnostic or prognostic assessment, and no "degrees of certainty" were assigned.

Conclusions

A. Data are insufficient to support a treatment standard for Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) scoring and pupil assessment in patients with severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) incurred in combat.
B. Measuring GCS score and assessing pupils:
    1. How to measure:

       The GCS score and pupil assessment should be determined by direct clinical examination.

    2. Who should measure:
        a. The far forward first medical provider (medic) should obtain the first score. At each echelon of care, the primary medical care provider should be responsible for measuring the GCS and assessing the pupils.
        b. Competence in measuring the GCS and assessing the pupils should be maintained.

    3. When to measure:
        a. The GCS and pupils should be measured as soon as tactically possible.
        b. At regular intervals, the GCS and pupils should be reassessed, in addition to measuring GCS before transport to the next echelon of care and after arrival at the higher echelon.

C. For acute pupillary dilation, brain herniation should be considered and appropriate intervention instituted (see the National Guideline Clearinghouse [NGC] summary of the Brain Trauma Foundation guideline Guidelines for the field management of combat-related head trauma. Treatment: brain-targeted therapies). However, patients exposed to chemical agents or explosive blast may experience iridoplegia, which is not indicative of herniation.

Summary

GCS scoring and assessment of pupils should be done in every patient with suspected TBI. The first provider should obtain these measurements as soon as possible, at regular intervals thereafter and before and after transport. Worsening of either should initiate appropriate treatment interventions.

No Class I evidence is available on which to base conclusions for these parameters. There are very limited numbers of studies conducted on the battlefield of any level on which to determine this. Studies performed in the civilian sector were reviewed in order to evaluate the situation. There are no data from the U.S. military indicating the reliability of the GCS or pupillary response to light as a reliable indicator of the severity of head injury incurred in battle. In the civilian sector, Class II data from civilian victims suffering from traumatic head injury does demonstrate GCS's reliability, particularly with repeated scoring and improvement or deterioration of the score over time. Class II data from civilian patients demonstrate pupil assessment as a useful method for prognosticating poor outcome and as a diagnostic indicator of brain dysfunction, including herniation.

CLINICAL ALGORITHM(S)

A clinical algorithm for "Field Management of Combat-Related Head Trauma" is provided in the original guideline document.

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

TYPE OF EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

An evidentiary table appears at the end of each major section of the guideline document, which classifies each citation based on the quality of the evidence.

The conclusions are supported by seven class III studies, which include one or more of the following types of studies: moderate or poor quality cohort; moderate or poor quality case control; or case series, databases, or registries.

BENEFITS/HARMS OF IMPLEMENTING THE GUIDELINE RECOMMENDATIONS

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Appropriate use of Glasgow Coma Scale scoring and assessment of pupils in the management of combat-related head trauma

POTENTIAL HARMS

Not stated

QUALIFYING STATEMENTS

QUALIFYING STATEMENTS

- The information contained in the *Guidelines for the Field Management of Combat-Related Head Trauma*, which reflects the current state of knowledge at the time of completion (November 2005), is intended to provide accurate and authoritative information about the subject matter covered. Because there will be future developments in scientific information and technology, it is anticipated that there will be periodic review and updating of these Guidelines. These Guidelines are distributed with the understanding that the Brain Trauma Foundation is not engaged in rendering professional medical services. If medical advice or assistance is required, the services of a competent physician should be sought. The recommendations contained in these Guidelines may not be appropriate for use in all circumstances. The decision to adopt a particular recommendation contained in these Guidelines must be based on the judgment of medical personnel, who take into consideration the facts and circumstances in each case and on the available resources.
- The majority of available recommendations are extrapolated from civilian data. In some instances, it will be obvious that the best civilian data have direct application to military scenarios. In others, it will be equally obvious that the best available civilian recommendation is impractical at best, and

potentially threatening to life or mission accomplishment at worst. The guideline authors have attempted to discriminate between the two as often as possible, based on the available military-specific literature and personal experience. Ultimately, it will be the decision of the individual medic and/or the unit chain of command as to whether a particular diagnostic or therapeutic maneuver can be implemented. The general direction the authors have taken with their recommendations is that the best-known community standard should be implemented whenever possible.

- The recommendations in these guidelines are based on the best available data, and the authors maintained a patient-driven focus during development. In other words, each recommendation was created based upon the best care possible for the patient, in spite of the fact that tactical limitations may prevent this level of care from actually being available to all patients at all times. It should also be noted that guidelines such as these are quite different than protocols developed by medical facilities or military units. Protocols should be generated locally to give very specific directions as to how individual providers are to act in a variety of situations. Guidelines such as these are intended to serve as a starting point for the development of facility-specific protocols.
- Factors that create limitations in the level of medical care available in the combat environment include the overall tactical scenario, physiologic parameters associated with combat, and logistics. The guideline authors' ability to develop standards for optimal management is limited by a lack of scientific data. The majority of the recommendations provided are extrapolated from civilian data. While many of these recommendations will be both practical and applicable, the ability of the individual medic to provide this care may be limited.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDELINE

DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

An implementation strategy was not provided.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Clinical Algorithm

For information about availability, see the "Availability of Companion Documents" and "Patient Resources" fields below.

INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE (IOM) NATIONAL HEALTHCARE QUALITY REPORT CATEGORIES

IOM CARE NEED

Getting Better

IOM DOMAIN

Effectiveness

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION AND AVAILABILITY

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCE(S)

Knuth T, Letarte PB, Ling G, Moores LE, Rhee P, Tauber D, Trask A. Guidelines for the field management of combat-related head trauma. Assessment: Glasgow Coma Scale scoring and assessment of pupils. New York (NY): Brain Trauma Foundation; 2005. 10 p. [27 references]

ADAPTATION

Not applicable: The guideline was not adapted from another source.

DATE RELEASED

2005

GUIDELINE DEVELOPER(S)

Brain Trauma Foundation - Disease Specific Society

SOURCE(S) OF FUNDING

Brain Trauma Foundation

Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

GUIDELINE COMMITTEE

Not stated

COMPOSITION OF GROUP THAT AUTHORED THE GUIDELINE

Authors: Tom Knuth, MD, MPH, FACS, COL, Medical Corps, US Army, Chief, Combat Casualty Care Integrated Concepts Team, Directorate of Combat Doctrine and Development, Army Medical Department Center and School, Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Peter B. Letarte, MD, FACS, Neurosurgeon, Hines VA Medical Center, Loyola University Medical Center; Geoffrey Ling, MD, PhD, LTC, Medical Corps, US Army, Professor and Vice-Chair of Neurology, Director of Critical Care Medicine, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Bethesda, Maryland; Leon E. Moores, MD, FACS, LTC, Medical Corps, US Army, Assistant Professor of Surgery and Pediatrics, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Chief of Neurosurgery, Director of Pediatric Neurological Surgery, Walter Reed Army Medical Center; Peter Rhee, MD, MPH, FACS, FCCM, CAPT, Medical Corps, US Navy, Professor of Surgery/Molecular Cellular Biology, Director, Navy Trauma Training Center, Los Angeles County Medical Center, University of Southern California; David Tauber, CCEMT-P, NREMT-P, I\C, Executive Director, Advanced Life Support Institute (New Hampshire) Medical Specialist/Hazardous Materials Technician, FEMA USAR Team MA1; Art Trask, MD, FACS, INOVA Regional Trauma Center, INOVA Fairfax Hospital

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES/CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Not stated

GUIDELINE STATUS

This is the current release of the guideline.

GUIDELINE AVAILABILITY

Electronic copies: Available in Portable Document Format (PDF) from the Brain Trauma Foundation Web site.

Print copies: Available from the Brain Trauma Foundation, 708 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

AVAILABILITY OF COMPANION DOCUMENTS

None available

PATIENT RESOURCES

None available

NGC STATUS

This NGC summary was completed by ECRI Institute on August 24, 2007. The information was verified by the guideline developer on January 28, 2008.

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